

SOME DIFFICULTIES PROPOSED FOR SOLUTION:

2530
IN A

L E T T E R

TO THE

REV. JOHN MURRAY,

CONCERNING HIS

DISCOURSE ON THE ORIGIN OF EVIL.

WITH SOME

ADDITIONAL REMARKS.

K Worcester (h.)

BY AN IMPARTIAL INQUIRER.

As a man is accountable only for the use of his own understanding, not for that of other men's ; consequently, his safety consists, not in giving up his own to the direction and control of others, but in using it himself to the best advantage. If he follows the judgment of other men, though ever so wise and learned, contrary to his own sense of things, he may, perchance, PROFESS what is RIGHT, but he DOES what is WRONG.

FURNEAUX,

They have chosen their own ways.

JEHOVAH.

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MDCCKCIII.



P R E F A C E.

AS we must all give account to God for our faith and practice, and each one for himself, it becomes the indispensable obligation of every one to improve his own understanding in search after truth ; and not to yield an implicit faith to the sayso of another, however venerable and great.

The letter contained in the following sheets was written without any design to make it publick from the press : But Mr. Murray was pleased to decline giving an answer in the private way which I preferred ; and I had too good an opinion of his candour, ingenuity, and regard for religion, to think he disdained to answer an inferiour, in any matter of serious and religious concernment ; and was conscious he might have a much better reason for declining. Having the charge of a numerous congregation, he might think it inconsistent with duty to spend so much time to instruct an individual, as it would take to obviate the difficulties I had proposed for solution.

But still remaining incapable of resolving the difficulties myself, and finding others equally embarrassed, who were desirous that the letter should be published, with some additional remarks ; with deference to their judgment, I consented, supposing it would obviate the forementioned reason of his declining an answer ; as it is thought probable more than one will be instructed, if the objections and difficulties I have suggested should receive a fair and candid solution.

I pretend to no equality with Mr. Murray, but that of a candidate for eternity. I mean not to enter the field of publick controversy as a disputant, but only as an impartial, inquisitive spectator.

I have objected to nothing in Mr. Murray's discourse, but what appeared to me repugnant to the word of God, and the dictates of impartial reason. I have not designedly misconstrued

ed his words in any instance, nor mentioned one consequence but what appeared to me to flow spontaneously from his own words.

The latter part of the letter, in which I suggested some of my own ideas upon the point in dispute, I think I should not have written, had I then designed to publish. But to prevent exceptions, it appeared needful to publish the whole letter. I hope therefore to be excused the liberty I have taken to explain myself, and enforce the ideas.

I have made no alterations, that I am aware of, in the sense of the letter, and very few even with regard to style.

I am not fond of the term author, in this dispute, it being often taken in an ill sense, and have designedly neglected it in the following remarks; wishing to clothe my ideas in language as inoffensive as possible. There are other terms made use of by almost all christians, I believe of every denomination, which I suppose import as much as the word author, in the sense it is used. Few, I think, scruple, in their addresses to God, to stile him *THE GREAT FIRST CAUSE* of all things; *THE ALL-WISE DISPOSER* of all events, &c. &c. And as these terms are seldom taken in an ill sense, perhaps it would be better to use them instead of the term author.

I wish to have it carefully remembered, through the whole of the following remarks, that I have no thought or suspicion that God is in any way the cause of sin, which reflects the least dishonour on his glorious character, or renders sinners less criminal than if they were independent agents, in an absolute sense. I suppose he is the cause of evil, no otherwise than by being the cause of all volition. And by volition, I understand free agency or voluntary action. And if any one will convince me that any thing I have written is in any manner injurious to the divine character, or inconsistent with free agency and criminality in the sinner, I shall most cordially renounce it, and think myself under obligations of gratitude for his service.

A LETTER



A
L E T T E R

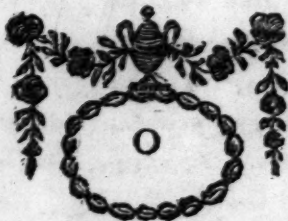
TO THE

REV. JOHN MURRAY.



THORNTON, *July* 30, 1785.

DEAR AND REVEREND SIR,



F late I have been favoured with a discourse of yours, upon THE ORIGIN OF EVIL. Upon a careful and attentive perusal of which, some difficulties arose, to me insuperable. Some of them I have penned in the following pages; expecting, if they are obviated, others will remove of course.

The readiness you manifested, some years ago, to converse with an inferiour, upon this point, emboldens me to lay before you these difficulties; in hopes you will condescend to write, and correct me, if wrong. I wish not to retain error, if I have imbibed it.

Your compliance, Sir, will oblige an inquirer after truth; who, without dissimulation, subscribes,

Your cordial friend, and humble servant,

NOAH WORCESTER.

Rev. JOHN MURRAY, *Newbury-Port.*

FIRST.

FIRST. "From the nature of causation," you say, "it is certain there can be no positive reality in the effect, which was not first in its cause." (Page 21.)

Will it not follow from this,

1. That there never was, and that there never can be any such thing as creation? For according to this, every thing positive in the effect, existed in its cause, prior to its appearing in the effect; and the same thing appearing only in a different form or mode, is by no means equivalent to what we commonly understand by creation.

2. That God is not only an immaterial, but a material substance? For if matter now exists, it existed in its cause.*

3. That

* In the testimony of the presbytery of which Mr. Murray is one, we are told, with regard to matter, that, "To suppose it to be an emanation from the divine essence, is either to deny its being matter, or to suppose matter and spirit to be the same thing." And again, "He that denies the immediate creation of matter, must maintain every single atom to be the eternal God," (p. 108.) The analogy of this with the proposition under consideration, I leave for the learned to explain.

Speaking of God (Sermon, p. 30) Mr. Murray says, "For however we assert him to be universally the first cause, it will by no means follow that he is the immediate efficient cause of all things. To affirm this, is downright pantheism. Pleading in this sense that God is all things, we unavoidably infer, that all things are God." Whether God is the immediate efficient cause of every thing or not, I do not see that asserting this, is pleading that God is all things, unless we suppose the cause and the effect to be invariably one and the same. But if affirming this, is pleading that God is all things, must not whatever he is the immediate cause of, be God? If the proposition be good in whole, why not in part? And will it not unavoidably follow from this method of reasoning, that all things are God? For, if whatever God be the immediate cause of, is God; then whatever the immediate effect produces, or is the cause of, by parity of reasoning, must be God likewise. And may we not thus comprise every thing in the universe, and have the last effect, as really God as the first effect, or even as the first cause.

Besides, if "there can be no positive reality in the effect which was not first in its cause;" unless there was something in God which was not
God,

3. That the Divine Being is a compound, not only of matter and spirit, but of all the natures, tempers, dispositions and qualities, in the animal and vegetable world ? And,

4. That God is all things and all things are God ? This you have exploded I am sensible ; but I see not but it follows inevitably. For if nothing positive can be in the effect, but what was first in its cause ; what are those things which we have supposed to be the works of creation, but emanations from

God, there can be nothing but God in any of the effects he has produced.

Mr. Murray grants, in p. 80, that God creates natural evil. In p. 10, he informs us, that " natural evil is properly the effect of moral." If natural evil be properly the effect of moral, how is it possible that God should be the cause of the latter but by being the cause of the former ? And if " there can be no positive reality in the effect which was not first in its cause," must it not follow, that natural evil was first in moral, and both were first in God ? And consequently, that God is not only the most sinful, but the most miserable of all beings ; guilty of all the sins, and subject to all the pains and distresses, which ever have been or will be in the universe !

Further, Mr. Murray teaches (p. 80) that " Natural evils are not real evils, but good, in a moral view." So it appears that something which is good in a moral view is the proper effect of moral evil. And consequently there is either something in the effect which was not in its cause ; or something in moral evil which is good in a moral view.

I must confess I see no way, upon these principles of causation, to account for the fall of angels and men, but by supposing that God was, not only the cause, but, the fountain of sin. For if there can be no positive reality in the effect which was not first in its cause, neither angel or man could be the cause of any evil but what was first in himself ; i. e. before he caused it ; and there could be no evil in them, but what was first in *their* cause, which was God himself. Yea, it is difficult for me to conceive in what their fall consisted ; for they could do nothing but cause that to be which was already in existence.

If these principles are admitted, it will perhaps be easy to conceive, in a sense heretofore unthought of, what Solomon meant by saying, *There is no new thing under the sun* : For there is nothing but what coexisted with the Deity from eternity.

from the Great First Cause, or "varying modes of his existence?"

SECONDLY. Upon the forementioned principle, you say, that "Evil can never come from any other than an evil cause," (p. 23.)

God, you allow, to be immutably good, and all the works of creation good. Angels and men at first upright. Moral evil, you grant, exists. Now, where shall we find an evil cause of this evil?

Nothing in the Creator, and nothing in the creation, but what was good; yet evil has taken place, which could not, without an evil cause. This, Sir, is a kind of paradox to me, which I cannot unriddle.*

If I agree with you, (p. 27) that the agent is the cause of his own acts, the difficulty still remains. For all the agents were good, until the first evil took place; and therefore they could not be the *evil* cause of the first *evil*.†

Or, if I grant evil originates from a deficiency in the finite understanding,‡ or in abuse of liberty, or what I will, *that* must

* If there was nothing but good in the universe, when evil first took place, what but good could be the cause of it?

† If it be inconsistent with goodness to cause evil, it is just as impossible that a good angel or man should be the cause of it, as that it should be caused by God himself. And since it is thus evident that the first evil had a good cause, why is it not as rational to suppose, that he who *worketh all things after the counsel of his own will*, for some holy and wise end, caused it to take place; as to suppose it was introduced contrary to his will, by some other good being whose will was perfectly conformed to his own?

‡ Mr. Murray says, (p. 32) "That moral agents should have any real evil in any faculty of their natures; that they should lack any faculty, or any good quality in any faculty, that might be necessary for enabling them to right action; or the want of which might cause them by a natural inclination to lean to wrong; or, in a word, that they should labour under any defect as they at first dropt from the all creating hand; these are all suppositions

must be evil, and must have an evil cause. And upon this footing I see no other way than to pursue, from effect to cause, until I have chased evil out of the universe, or fixed it in the Great First Cause.

THIRDLY. The next difficulty I shall mention, arises from your definition of moral evil. Having told what *virtue* is, you ask, "What then is *vice*?" And say, "All agree to answer, It is the direct opposite to virtue, and that in all respects.

positions which would infer, either that they were not the creatures of God, or that he was not a being of pure rectitude of nature."

In p. 37 and 38, we have something which appears to me of a contrary complexion: "A finite understanding cannot see all objects at once; nor all parts of the same object: Hence it cannot be infallible in its conceptions about any. The narrowness of its limits occasions the contemplation of one part of course to exclude the rest: Its best views are of consequence partial. From partial views wrong judgments may arise; by wrong judgments the objective motives may be unfairly presented to the will; and thus wrong volitions may be induced. Thence ensues a misapplication of all the powers, and so is brought forth all the evil belonging to the affections, passions, and conduct."

How to reconcile these passages, I am utterly at a loss. In the first we are taught, that evil "could not originate from the want of any faculty, or any good quality in any faculty, which might be necessary for enabling the agent to right action." In the latter, the cause of evil is all attributed to a natural deficiency in the finite understanding:

In the view of the latter paragraph, I would query, 1. Whether sin is any thing more than a bare mistake or error in judgment? 2. Whether God is not a hard master in requiring right volitions, without giving a competent understanding?

In page 36, Mr. Murray informs us, that he has found the *Achan* in the camp. He says, "The very existence of liberty opens the door for its being abused, and the abuse of it in fact is the immediate source of vice; the true cause or origin of all the evil in the universe."

The matter now seems to be brought to a point. Let us then examine a moment. Is not abuse of liberty, a sin itself? Will not every body say, Yes? What then have we found, but the most manifest confusion of cause and effect; one sin not only made the cause of another, but the same sin, both the cause and the effect of *itself*!

spects. If virtue then is a positive, vice is a negative, in the nature of things." Permit me, Sir, to vary the mode of expression : If virtue is something, vice is nothing, in the nature of things. Further, if virtue be a moral exercise, sin is not. This I think amounts to no more than your own words. You say, " Sin is only the privation, want, or absence, of the positive nature ; and unless we would venture to say, the Great First Cause is a deficient cause, we may not go about to affirm that it required an exertion of his omnipotent energy to produce sin ; or that defect, nonentity, or mere privation, is the effect of divine creating might." If this be a just definition of sin, I think the dispute is very needless ; a dispute about *nothing*, or, rather, the *cause of nothing*.

But, Sir, there are some things in scripture, and your own writings, which I cannot construe in consistency with this definition. The Bible tells me that sin is (not barely the want of conformity unto, but) a transgression of the law ; that the carnal mind is enmity against God ; that sinners are haters of God, light, truth, &c. that they love themselves, falsehood and vanity. It appears to me that these representations amount to more than " nonentity, mere privation."*

Privation

* When I wrote the letter, I apprehended a difficulty in admitting any nature to sin, upon Mr. Murray's definition. Since which, to remove that difficulty, I have been told, that there is a reality in privation. But this is yet above my comprehension ; and I wish to have it explained what that reality is, which consists in the privation or absence of Christ's body from the earth. It is true, there is a reality with regard to matter of fact ; i. e. his body is really absent : But does the mere absence of his body constitute any thing upon which a nature can be predicated ?

Perhaps some may think there is a reality in darkness, which is caused by the absence or privation of the sun. But it may be observed, that darkness was upon the face of the deep before the sun was brought into existence. And if darkness was the same, before the sun existed, as it is now, in consequence of its withdrawment, why may we not as rationally suppose, that the privation or absence of the sun, was the cause of that

previous

Privation and nonentity can make no resistance : But the Bible informs us, that sinners do always resist the Holy Ghost. And I cannot see how "nonentity or mere privation" can commence and maintain such a war with holiness, as the apostle

previous darkness, as of that which succeeds its diurnal departure ? Or why may we not as well say, that washing paint from the skin, is the cause of the natural complexion which appears in consequence thereof ?

But granting that sin is the privation of holiness, and that in this privation there is a reality, I ask, What then is virtue ? If it be, as Mr. Murray says, the direct opposite to vice in all respects ; if there be a reality in vice, there is none in virtue. But how shall we compromise these matters ? Virtue is a positive, vice a negative ; in vice there is a reality, in virtue there is none. What then shall we say, but that virtue is a positive *nothing*, and vice a negative *something* ?

I was much surprised to find such a definition of moral evil in Mr. Murray's performance. For I really thought, from his former publications, that he was full in the sentiment of man's positive sinfulness. In his sermon on the death of Mrs. Lane, he says of the heart of man, "We look into it for love, and lo ! enmity against God reigns in every passion, and gives its own complexion to all our inward powers." Again, of man, he says, "His innate antipathy against God and holiness, has poisoned his taste, and jaundiced his eye."

Much more of the same complexion might be collected from his publications. But now it seems we are to give a negative meaning to all such passages, and allow them to import no more than a mere blank in the soul, which ought to be filled with holiness.

And if we admit the definition, when the Bible represents the hearts of sinners as full of evil, madness, hatred, enmity, &c. these must all stand for negatives, and import no more than that the heart, that noble apartment, assigned for the residence of holy love, instead of being filled with *that*, or any thing else, is but a mere vacuity, without inhabitant.

But if language has become so fickle and indeterminate, that positives and negatives are used as convertible terms, is it not vain to attempt ever to establish any point by the Bible, or any other form of words ? If one may affix a negative meaning to the words *sin*, *hatred*, *enmity*, &c. why may not another do the same by *love*, *holiness*, *charity*, &c. and affirm that they only import a privation of sin, enmity, &c. ? What foundation in scripture have we for one, more than the other ?

But,

tle describes, or lead persons to commit murder, blasphemy, &c. In Bathkol* it is said, respecting sinners, "Their wills are enmity against God," (p. 201.) And, in p. 219, describing the difference between legal and evangelical repentance, it is said, "The horrors of one, arising from enmity against God," &c. In p. 265, mention is made of vicious habits and dispositions, of their natures, and the everlasting permanency of them. I see not how privation can constitute enmity; or how nature and permanency can be predicated of nonentity.

In the discourse under consideration, you say, "It is evident the sinner's defect is wilful." Does not wilfulness imply something positive? In the same discourse you say, "It cannot be a problem whether moral evil in fact exists." Does not existence imply positive being? And is it not difficult to ascribe existence to nonentity?

If my difficulties here arise from a misconception of the meaning of the words negative, deficiency, privation, nonentity, or existence, I hope you will excuse my want of education.

FOURTHLY. There are difficulties attending your answers to some of the objections.

As to the first, (which is, "The existence of sin is necessary,") I know of none who suppose the existence of sin necessary, in any other sense than the death of Christ was necessary.†

In

But, by the way, on supposition that sinners are totally depraved; and that their depravity consists in the mere absence or privation of holiness, I wish to be informed upon what footing one sinner can be deemed a greater criminal than another. The difference of magnitude in nonentities I apprehend can be calculated only by cyphers.

* Testimony of the Presbytery.

† Here I was hardly explicit enough. I supposed both events were necessary for the display of the divine perfections, and the greatest good of the universe; one as really so as the other.

I think Mr. Murray has given a very foreign construction to the word *necessary*, from what it appears to have in the objection. He says, "What-
ever

In answer to the second, (which is, "Sin was necessary for the greatest good of the universe, and the greatest glory of God,") you say, "To suppose the greatest good of the universe is the result of sin, is to make all the happy beings in it greater debtors for their bliss to sin, than to God." But, Sir, it is generally granted, and I think revelation confirms it, that to accomplish the purpose of God in redemption, it was necessary that the Jews should crucify the Lord of glory. And will it not follow from what you have said, that all the redeemed are greater debtors for their bliss, to this conduct of the Jews, than to God ?*

Further, ever existence is necessary, must be eternal." I believe but few readers would understand the objection any otherwise, than if the word needful had been used, instead of necessary. Perhaps Mr. Murray would not scruple to say that it was necessary for him to write in defence of what he supposed to be the truth : But if the word must be taken in his sense, it would imply, that he had been writing from eternity. Paul says, *Those members of the body which seem to be more feeble, are necessary.* Mr. M—y says, "Necessary existence is an incommunicable attribute of God himself. To ascribe it, then, to any other being, is impious blasphemy." What then does he less than to charge Paul with "impious blasphemy ?"

* How God came either to cause or permit sin to take place, unless he supposed it necessary for the greatest good of the universe, is to me inconceivable. Mr. Murray supposes God did every thing he could, "*consistent with his station to do,*" to prevent sin's taking place, (p. 90.) And that he could not have shut it out without excluding virtue too, (p. 65.) And also, that there is no fault in the present plan which could have been prevented, but by a greater fault, (p. 63.) Yet in answer to the present objection, he supposes sin was not necessary for the greatest good of the universe. Now what ideas do such passages force on the mind, but these : That God could not devise a plan that was perfectly agreeable to his mind ; but chose the present as the best he could devise, in compliance with the common maxim, "Between two evils choose the least ;" that he has been infinitely crossed and disappointed by the sins which have taken place in the world ; that he projected the plan of redemption to repair the inroads which were made within his jurisdiction against his will ;
that

Further, you say, "To assert sin to be necessary for God's greatest glory, is to make sin the foundation of Jehovah's throne." By the glory of God, in the objection, I understand what is called his declarative glory, or the display of the divine perfections. And is not the sin of the Jews, beforementioned, according to your argument, the foundation of Jehovah's throne? I cannot think you will deny *that* to be necessary for the greatest display of the divine perfections.*

The third objection, you say, is both arrogant and absurd. Arrogant, as it presumes to dictate to infinite wisdom, &c. I confess I do not see any arrogance in the objection. But you say, "It is absurd, as it speaks of the greatest evil as in itself a great good. For that cannot be very bad which is indispensable to the best of all possible schemes." I do not see that evil is spoken of, in the objection, as in itself a great good, notwithstanding your argument: And the difficulty in my mind, on this particular, will appear in full view, if you will permit me to apply the argument to a plain case. The scheme which God had in view, in the redemption of fallen men, was the best of all possible schemes; that the Jews should embroil their hands in the blood of his Son, ~~was~~ indispensable to the accomplishment of this scheme; therefore their conduct in so doing could not be very bad.

If

that he has been almost ever since the creation, endeavouring to repair the loss which he sustained by the fall of Adam? What ideas more diminutive could be formed of the Almighty? Can this be thought characteristic of him *who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will*; and declares, *My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure*? Of him *in whose hand our breath is, and whose are all our ways*?

* Can it be supposed that the work of redemption was not necessary for the brightest display of divine glory? Or can it be supposed that it was not necessary there should be sinners to redeem, in order to the accomplishment of this work? If not, how can it be supposed that the taking place of sin was not necessary for the greatest glory of God, and the greatest good of the universe?

If I should allow that this was not the best of all possible schemes, the difficulty still remains : For if sin may be necessary in any good plan, it may be in the best.*

In answer to the 4th objection (which is, "Infinite wisdom and power must of necessity choose and do the very best at all times that it can,") you say, "If God must of necessity act so, then, the Almighty is chained fast in fate." But the Bible, Sir, leads us to conclude that God cannot lie, do unrighteously,

* The objection which is so arrogant and absurd, is this, "Sin was a necessary part of the best possible plan for moral government."

In shewing the arrogance of this objection, Mr. Murray quotes two lines from Mr. Pope :

"Snatch from his hand the balance and the rod,
Rejudge his justice, be the god of God."

Mr. Pope, "to vindicate the ways of God to man," says;

"All nature is but art unknown to thee ;
All chance, direction which thou canst not see ;
All discord, harmony not understood ;
All partial evil, universal good ;
In spite of pride, in erring reason's spite,
One truth is clear, whatever is, is right."

And to expose the folly and stupidity of those, who imagine that things might have been planned and conducted better than they have, he says to them,

"Go wiser thou ! and, in thy scale of sense,
Weigh thy opinion against providence ;
Call imperfection what thou fanciest such ;
Say, here he gives too little, there too much ;
Destroy all creatures for thy sport or gust ;
Yet cry, if man 's unhappy, God 's unjust :
If man alone engrosses not heav'n's high care ;
Alone made perfect here, immortal there ;
Snatch from his hand the balance and the rod,
Rejudge his justice, be the god of God."

ESSAY ON MAN.

In justice to the dead, I have quoted these lines from Mr. Pope, to contrast with the sentiment he is forced to espouse. I shall leave Mr. Murray, and the reader, to make such reflections and observations as shall naturally occur.

cously, &c. and may we venture to say upon this, that "the Almighty is chained fast in fate, that there is left no liberty in his acts," &c ? I am sensible your answer mentions *natural necessity* ; but that is not mentioned in the objection ; and I know of none who make this objection, who insist on any other necessity than what arises from the rectitude of the divine nature, or the perfections of the Deity.

As to the objection's setting boundaries to infinity,* I suppose the perfections of the Deity may be more manifested from some parts of his work, than others ; and he, notwithstanding, act in the best manner possible at all times. The wisdom of a mechanick may be more conspicuous from some parts of a curious machine, than others : Yet his wisdom and power may be employed in the best manner possible, in making every part of the machine : Nor should we think he would discover more wisdom, if he should spend all his time, in making some curious part, than he does in making every part necessary for utility. The wisdom of the workman is known, not only from the apparent beauty of the several parts of his workmanship, separately viewed, but from the adaptedness of the whole to utility, when put together. And if every part be as curiously wrought as is necessary for the beauty and utility of the whole, when put together, it diminishes none from the wisdom of the workman, to say, his skill is more conspicuous from some parts, than others. For this may be, and yet his wisdom, on the whole, appear most consummate. So, if God has ever one great end in view, in all he does, I think it not safe to say, his wisdom

* Mr. Murray asks (p. 60) " whether the very idea of infinity does not infer that it never came up to its *ne plus ultra*, and that it never can ?" If I may be permitted to answer, according to my own judgment, I will say, No : But the very idea of infinite wisdom and power, under the direction of infinite goodness, infers, that they are ever up to their *ne plus ultra*, and never can deviate from it.

Query, Whether Mr. Murray's reasoning on this point does not infer that God has ability to do more than he can ?

dom and power are not employed in the best manner possible at all times, although they are more conspicuous in an angel, than a toad. Nor may we think they would have been better employed, had he created an equal number of angels and men, instead of reptiles and insects. And however futurity may present to our view, "system built on system, and world on world," as you mention, yet I humbly conceive, we shall have no reason to think that the allwise God does not now, and at all times, choose and do the very best he can. You call this a shocking position;* but it appears to me far less shocking than

* Mr. Murray says, (p. 62) "This shocking position was never maintained until very lately, unless by those pagans who held the world to be an infinite body, of which God was the infinite soul." I know not how many years the words *very lately* may comprise; but I think we may trace this shocking position back through the Bible down to Moses' history of the creation: And him we find full in the sentiment: He says, *God's work is perfect*. If his work is perfect, I conclude it could not be better. To say his work is perfect, but at the same time he could choose and do better, is, in my view, a most palpable contradiction.

This sentiment of Mr. Murray, impeaches the divine character in such a shocking manner, as it appears to me, that it really gives me pain to attend to it. If any have really such ideas of God, can it be wondered at, that they should be opposed to the sentiment of unreserved confidence and submission? If we yield to this, what ground have we for confidence in the Almighty? Just so far as he falls short of choosing and doing the best he can, just so far he deviates from perfect rectitude. And if it be, as Mr. Murray freely intimates, that God never did and never will choose and do the best he can, is it not certain that his plan, and all his administrations, have been, and will be imperfect?

Can his work of creation or redemption be perfectly right? Can his distribution of rewards and punishments be right? And if he may deviate in *one* degree from perfect rectitude, why not in *ten*? Or why may he not, instead of choosing and doing the *best* he can, choose and do the *worst* he can? May we not adopt Mr. Murray's own words, and say, "How horrible must such doctrine be to the heart that loves to adore the Most High! Who would wish to be ruled by a sovereign of this sort? Who would choose to be at the absolute disposal of such a being,

than to assert, that a God of infinite wisdom and power does not choose and do the best he can. For the greatest difficulty arises, when I come to inquire for the reason why he does not ; because I can assign no other than a deficiency in his goodness, or something *worse*, if worse can be imagined. Will God require his creatures to do good to the utmost of their abilities, and as this tenet describes ? Who could ever worship him in spirit and truth ?”

Mr. Murray teaches us that God has bound himself to observe the same rule of right by which he governs his creatures, (p. 48.) And one part of that rule is this, *To him that knoweth to do good and doth it not, to him it is sin.* And according to Mr. Murray’s reasoning, there is a good which God has been knowing to from eternity, and has had every ability to effect, but has not done it : Therefore, if Mr. Murray’s doctrine be true, is not the Most High chargeable with sinful deficiency ; both according to his own word, and the common sense of mankind ?

I now submit it to better judges, whether Mr. Murray’s sentiments do not imply more than that God is the cause of sin, in the sense of his opponents, yea, even that he himself is a sinner !

But notwithstanding all he has said against the necessity of God’s choosing and doing the best he can ; he informs us, (p. 54) that all right minds would rejoice in the reign of that being, who is incapable of deviating from the moral perfections of his nature. But if God be incapable of deviating from the moral perfections of his nature, is he not under a necessity of acting conformably to them ; and consequently of choosing and doing the best he can at all times ? Or shall we absurdly suppose the moral perfections of his nature imperfect ?

How Mr. Murray came to introduce this impertinent objection, unless he meant to give up the point in dispute, and upon that demonstrate an imperfection in the divine plan and conduct, is to me inconceivable. For on the footing of sin’s not being necessary to the greatest good ; and that God is in no sense the cause of it ; nothing more foreign than this objection could have been thought of. Who, without forgetting what he was about, would ever think of proving that God was not the cause of sin, by demonstrating that he did not choose and do the best he could at all times ? If Mr. Murray had been endeavouring to prove that God was the cause of evil, upon his principles of causation, it might have been necessary to answer such an objection. And the answer he has given would have been very pertinent, if it were conclusive,

and will he not do the same himself? If so, how shall God judge the world?

You allow, in answer to the 6th objection, that God wills to permit sin; but say, that does not infer that he willed it to be. It is difficult for me to conceive how God could will to permit it, without willing it to be. It appears to me, that God could not will to permit it, unless he thought it best, on the whole, that it should exist. And if he thought best it should exist, how is it possible but he should will its existence? Must not a God of infinite perfection will the existence of every thing, which it is best on the whole should exist? * Nor do I see,

* Was it not on the whole best that the perfections of the Deity should be manifested in the glorious work of redemption? If so, was it not best that there should be sinners to redeem, and consequently best that sin should take place? And if it was best on the whole that sin should take place, was it not best that things should be so ordered as to render the existence of it infallibly certain? If so, who with greater propriety or probability can be supposed to be the ordering and disposing cause of this event than HE whose right it is to reign? And is it any reproach upon the divine character to say, that God ordered, disposed, and caused things to take place, in such a manner as it was on the whole best they should take place? If it was on the whole best that sin should take place, then causing it to take place, was only causing that to be, which it was on the whole best should be.

I am not able to conceive how any person of good penetration and discernment can find any relief or satisfaction, from the common distinction between willing and permitting.

"Here," says Mr. Calvin, "they run into the distinction of will and permission: But why should we say that God permitted it, but because he so willeth?" B. 3. C. 23. S. 8.

Again he says, "God doth not only permit, but appoint the things to be done, which wicked men do." B. 1. C. 18. S. 1. Further, "The wicked do sin and perish, not by God's permission only, but by his will and appointment." B. 3. C. 23. S. 8. "God did not only foresee, but dispose the fall of man." B. 3. C. 23. S. 7.

Mr. Murray quotes Mr. Calvin as one who was strenuously opposed to the doctrine of God's being the author of sin; and no doubt he was so, when

see, that his willing its existence implies, that sin is in itself a good, or that he has any more complacency in it, than he had in the sufferings of his Son, whom it pleased him to bruise.

By willing, I understand *decreeing*, purposing, choosing, or preferring.

That

when by author was meant the agent, or him in whom the evil volition or design is found. But in what sense he allowed the term, and in what he disallowed it, may be as safely determined from his own words as from any other person's.

In his 2. B. 4. C. 2. S. he asks, "How can we refer the self same work to God as author, to Satan as author, and to man as author of it? But that we must either excuse Satan by the company of God, or report God to be the author of evil? Very easily; if first we look upon the end why it was done, and then the manner how. The purpose of the Lord is by calamity to exercise the patience of his servants; the devil goeth about to drive him to despair; the Chaldeans, against right and law, seek gain of that which is another man's. Such diversity of purposes maketh great difference in the work. Therefore it is properly said that Satan doth work in the reprobate, in whom he exerciseth his kingdom, the kingdom of wickedness: It is also said that God worketh in them after his manner; because Satan himself, soasmuch as he is the instrument of his wrath, according to his bidding and commandment, turneth himself hither and thither to execute his just judgments. *I speak not here of God's universal moving, whereby all creatures are sustained, so from thence they take their effectual power of doing any thing; I speak only of that special doing which appeareth in every special act.* We see, therefore, that it is no absurdity that one self same act be ascribed to God, to Satan, and to man; but the diversity in the end, and manner of doing, causeth that therein appeareth the justice of God to be without fault; and also the wickedness of Satan and man bewrayeth itself to their reproach."

Speaking of Sihon, he says, "Therefore because it was God's will to have him destroyed, the making his heart obstinate was God's preparation for his destruction." B. 2. C. 4. S. 3. "There ariseth a hard question, says he, out of other places, when it is said that God boweth, and draweth at his will, Satan himself and all the reprobate. Upon this was devised the distinction between doing and suffering. It seemeth to them unreasonable that man should, by the will and commandment of God, be made blind, and so by and by punished for his blindness. Therefore
they

That you may have full advantage to correct me, I shall expose some of my own ideas to your examination.

1. I conceive that the Ruler of the universe is a God of infinite immutable purity and perfection.

2. That he has had, from eternity, one great and glorious end in view : For the accomplishment of which he infallibly foreordained whatever comes to pass.

3. That *angels* and *men* are moral agents.

4. That moral agency is found in volition, and not in any thing prior to it, or consequent upon it : Not in causing volition, or doing as we please, but rather in being pleased to do, or choosing.

5. That volitions are of two kinds, good and evil. That holiness expresses the nature of good volitions, and sin the nature of evil. That holiness and sin express different *natures*, and not different *causes*.

6. That the hearts of all, as well as the King's, are in the hands of the Lord ; and that he turneth them whithersoever he

they seek to escape by this shift, that this is done by the sufferance, but not by the will of God. But he himself plainly pronouncing that he *doth it, doth reject that shift*. If the madness of Ahab be the judgment of God, then the device of bare sufferance, is vain. They trifle, that thrust in a bare sufferance, in place of the providence, of God ; as though God sat in a watch-tower, waiting for the chances of fortune, and so his judgments should hang upon the will of men. B. 1. C. 18. S. 1. And I do turn back their objection : For if to harden, do signify but a bare sufferance, then, the very notion of obstinacy shall not be properly in Pharaoh. Now, how weak and foolish were it to expound, as if Pharaoh did only suffer himself to be hardened ?" B. 1. C. 18. S. 2.

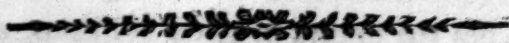
That there is a perfect analogy in all Mr. Calvin has written upon this point, I will not assert. If there be not, I am not accountable for that. I have not quoted him as infallible proof of any thing that I have said or am about to say. These quotations, however, may serve to shew that the ideas I am about to illustrate are not altogether of modern invention. At the same time, the quotations must stand or fall according to their merit.

he will ; and thus governs all their actions, agreeably to the assembly's catechism.

7. That God's being the cause of volition, does not infringe upon free agency : That he may be the cause of sinful volitions, consistently with free agency and criminality, as well as of holy volitions, consistently with free agency and praise-worthiness.

8. That men are not passive in volition, but active ; they may be considered as efficient in volition ; but not the cause of their own efficiency.

END OF THE LETTER.



I L L U S T R A T I O N S.

AS the foregoing ideas were not at first designed for publick inspection, I hope to be indulged the liberty of making some observations to illustrate them.

1. As to the first, I suppose no illustration is needful.

2. With respect to foreordination or decree : By this I understand the eternal unchangeable will and purpose of God, respecting the existence of future events.

Before God exerted his power in creation, did not the existence of all future events depend absolutely on his sovereign will and pleasure ? And did not the ordering and disposing of them all, of consequence, devolve on himself ? Did he not know the sure effect and consequence of every exertion of his power ? And when he willed an exertion of his power, did he not will the existence of every event that was consequential thereto ? If so, how could Mr. Murray say, that God's decrees were neither the natural or moral cause of evil ?* I can easily agree with Mr. Murray, that something more than the eternal
decree

* Page 74.

decree is necessary to an event's taking place : But does not the exertion of divine power depend upon the volition or purpose of the divine mind, as really as the effect produced does on the exertion of power which produces it ? If so, did not every event that ever took place, come into existence in an absolute dependence on the divine will or decree ?

Mr. Murray has written several pages to prove that neither the divine foreknowledge or decree made the existence of sin necessary. "I allow," says President Edwards, "what Dr. Whitby says, that mere knowledge does not affect the thing known to make it more certain or future. But yet I say, it supposes and proves the thing to be already, both future and certain, i. e. necessarily future."

Does not the foreknowledge of an event, depend on a perceived connexion between the event foreknown, and something which is to be the cause and ground of its existence ? And is not this connexion of cause and effect established by the will of the Most High ? If it be not, is not his will subjected to a fatal connexion of causes and effects, which he had no hand in establishing ? But if it be, did he not will the existence of the event foreknown, by willing and establishing the connexion between that and its cause ? And does not such a will and such an established connexion, make the existence of the event both certain and necessary ? Calvin says, "I confess sincerely with Augustin, that the will of God is a necessity of things, and that what he willeth must of necessity come to pass."*

3. That angels and men are moral agents. This I believe is rarely disputed. But with regard to angels, I think it is denied by Mr. Murray.† If I understand him, he supposes a state of confirmation utterly inconsistent with moral agency—virtue or vice. He says, "Such interference, before their probation is expired, would be in direct contradiction to moral government. Freedom is necessary to both virtue and

vice,

* B. 3. C. 23. S. 8.

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† See page 41, 42, 43.

vice. The creature then, who, by these means, is made incapable of vice, could no longer possess or exercise virtue by his own choice ; and therefore not at all." And much more of the same complexion. In what then does the happiness of the heavenly state consist, if the inhabitants of it are incapacitated for the exercise of virtue and holiness ? This is a resting from their labours, in an emphatical sense, which I never thought of before. And who but the slothful servant would wish for such a heaven as this ? Is not this rather a confirmation *against* holiness, than a confirmation *in* holiness ? And will not the christian, who finds his happiness in the exercise of holiness, shudder at the thought of being thus rendered incapable of it ?

But, by the way, does not Mr. Murray's reasoning conclude as forcibly against the virtue of the Divine Being, as against that of angels and the spirits of just men made perfect ? For who is more confirmed in holiness, or incapable of vice, than the God of truth ?

4. That moral agency is found in volition, &c. If, instead of saying that moral agency is found in volition, I had said, moral agency *is* volition, my idea would have been more happily expressed : For I supposed moral agency and moral volition were precisely one and the same.

Mr. Murray supposes *moral agency* implies a " liberty or power to *act*, or *not* to *act*, according to the pleasure of the agent." And that without *this liberty*, no one could be properly a subject of law ; capable of virtue or vice ; or deserving of praise or blame.*

If by a liberty or power to act, or not to act, Mr. Murray means internal action or choosing, is not the proposition absurd ? For, what is the difference between choosing as we please, and choosing as we choose ? But if he meant external action, or a power to execute the desire or purpose of the heart, is not the sentiment evidently fallacious ? *As a man thinketh*

thinketh in his heart, so is he. If a person who really desires to kill or injure his neighbour, is prevented by a fit of the palsy, or some extrinſick cauſe, is he excuſable in the eye of him who looketh on the heart ?

Mr. Murray informs us, in his ſermon on the death of Mrs. Lane, that the wills of finners are ſuch, that they would not ſpare even the life of Jehovah, were he a man, or within their power : So that if the liberty or power he pleads for is neceſſary to conſtitute a moral agent, a ſinner cannot be one *completely*, without being inveſted with power ſufficient to take the life of his Maker : And conſequently, in the exerciſe of all that enmity againſt God, he is not a moral agent, nor blame-worthy, *becauſe he hath not a liberty or power to act according to his pleaſure.*

That Mr. Murray ſpoke with reference to external action, I think is pretty evident from p. 35, where he explains himſelf, “ A liberty of acting according to choice, and chooſing freely.”

5. With regard to holineſs and ſin, I conceive that they are predicated on the nature of volitions, without any reference to their cauſe. And if they cannot be predicated in this manner, I think it is eaſy to demonſtrate that there is neither of them in the univerſe. Preſident Edwards ſays, “ If the vice of a vicious act of the will, lies not in the nature of the act, but the cauſe ; then for the ſame reaſon neither can the viciousneſs of that cauſe lie in the nature of the thing itſelf, but in its cauſe ; and when we come to this higher cauſe, ſtill the reaſon of the thing holds good. And thus we muſt drive faultineſs back from a lower cauſe to a higher *in infinitum* : And that is thoroughly to baniſh it from the world. On theſe principles, vice, or moral evil, cannot conſiſt in any thing that is an effect : And ſo it follows that faultineſs can lie only in that cauſe, which is a cauſe *only*, and no effect of any thing. Nor yet can it lie in this, for then it muſt lie in the

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the nature of the thing itself."* The same method of reasoning I suppose will hold good with respect to virtue.

6. The hearts of *all*, as well as the *King's*, are in the hand of the Lord, &c.

Solomon says, *The King's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water he turneth it whithersoever he will*, Prov. xxi. 1. And do we not find in proof of this, that the Lord stirred up Cyrus to build him an house at Jerusalem? And likewise that he stirred up many wicked Princes, and sent them to execute his judgments; that he hardened the hearts of Pharaoh† and Sihon; moved David to number the people; and

* Inquiry, page 270, 271. Boston Edition.

† Mr. Murray teaches us, (p. 89) that the heart of the sinner naturally hardens, when God withdraws his restraints; and says, "God can be considered as the cause of this hardness, no otherwise than the hand by which a stone had been held up in the air is the cause of its falling by letting it go; when the truth is, nothing but its own innate principle of gravitation carries it downwards." But does this remove any difficulty? What shall I reply to the inquisitive mind which asks me, Who is the cause of this innate principle of gravitation? The mind that is conscious there is such a principle, naturally inquires for the cause; for if it considers this innate principle as any thing distinct from the Deity, the inference of a prior cause is unavoidable.

I am aware of a very popular objection to this query. When the inquiry is carried to this length, many are ready to object and say, This is a secret not revealed, and we have no business to pry into it; it is affecting to be wise above what is written, &c. But is this in fact the case? Is it a secret which is not revealed? Is not the truth of the matter directly the reverse of this? Is it not revealed in the most plain and positive terms? And are not the plain declarations of God's word brought upon the rack, and made to speak a sense which the Holy Spirit never thought of, otherwise than as the inventions of some human minds, to hide the truth from themselves and others? And are not many loaded with the most horrible and odious epithets, for giving credit to the express language of the Bible? It appears to me a strange method of procedure, to attempt a vindication of God's character, by denying the truth of his own declarations. But who are they who affect to be wise above what is written,

and caused Rehoboam to reject the counsel of the old men, &c. &c.

But are Kings singular from the rest of mankind in this respect? Are not the hearts of others likewise in the hand of the

written; *they* who believe the word as it is written, or *they*, who pretend to know so much better than the Holy Spirit, as to contradict what he says, and give an opposite meaning to *his* words? When God says, he hardens the sinner's heart, *they* say he only suffers him to harden his own heart: When God says, he stirs up and sends wicked Princes to execute his vengeance on the rebellious; *they* say he only suffers them to stir themselves up, and *permits* them to go: When an *apostle* says, that sinners did what God's hand and counsel determined before to be done; *they* say, that God only "determined not to interpose his almighty arm, and hinder" their doing those things. If this is not affecting to be wise above what is written, I do not understand the phrase.

But is it not very evident that Paul understood something more by God's *hardening* the sinner's heart, than a bare permission? He introduces the matter in the ninth of Romans, in setting forth the sovereignty of God, in his disposal of events. *For the Scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this purpose have I raised thee up; that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy; and whom he will he hardeneth.* He then states an objection, which many have the confidence to make at the present day: Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? What pertinency would there have been in his attending to this objection, if he understood nothing more than that God permitteth sinners to harden their own hearts? Would any such objection naturally occur upon that footing? But why did he not invalidate the objection, by shewing it implied a falsehood, in supposing God's will was not resisted? He never so much as intimated that God's will was resisted; but answered the objection by the allegory of the potter and the clay; to shew that God does, and has a right to do, as he will with his creatures. He did not pretend to deny God's hardening the heart; but implicitly allowed it, after it was objected to, and endeavoured to shew that he had a right so to do.

As Mr. Murray allows that God is the cause of holy volitions, but not of those which are sinful, I think the allegory, to comport with his sentiments, should run thus; *Shall the thing formed say to him that let it form it-*
self,

the Lord ? If not, why is renewing, restraining and sanctifying the hearts of men, ascribed to him ? Why is victory ascribed to him, when his people's enemies are so disheartened and intimidated, that one may chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight ? Why did Joseph say to his brethren, YE thought EVIL against me, but God *meant it* unto good ? And again, God did send me before you to preserve life. Why did David say, Let him curse, for the Lord hath bidden him ? Why does the Psalmist say that God turned the hearts of the Egyptians to hate his people, to deal subtilly with his servants ? What does inspiration mean, by saying, Man's goings are of the Lord ; the way of man is not in himself ; and the Lord made all things for himself, even the wicked for the day of evil ?

Again, what do we mean when we acknowledge that our hearts are in the hand of the Lord, and pray him to turn us to himself ? To unite our hearts in prayer and praise, and in the common defence of the country ?

In

self, Why hast thou suffered me to make myself thus, or so ? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump, to make one vessel unto honour, and to PERMIT ANOTHER TO MAKE ITSELF unto dishonour ? And those likewise in Isaiah, Shall the ax boast itself against him that permitteth it to hew ? Or shall the saw magnify itself against him that SUFFERETH IT TO SHAKE ITSELF ? Again, Who unto him that saith to his father, what hast thou PERMITTED TO BEGET ITSELF, or to the woman, what hast thou suffered TO BRING ITSELF FORTH ? Such absurdity perhaps may be seen, if not felt.

When I read over what Mr. Murray has written with regard to Pharaoh, and other sinners, and take into view his definition of moral evil, I am utterly at a loss for an intelligible meaning to his words. For the self-existing, self-hardening, consolidating properties of mere privation and nonentity, I confess I do not understand.

If Mr. Murray had been as much in favour with his opponents, as he appears to be with the inspired writers, might he not as easily have reconciled their sentiments to his own, as to have reconciled the Bible ? Would not one method of procedure have answered in both cases ? It is only giving a negative construction to positive terms, and the work is completed.

In a word, what is the scope and design of the Bible, but to represent the Most High as the allwise disposer of *all events*; and us his creatures as totally dependent on him for our beings, and every power and faculty of action; and to teach us a proper temper of mind in this state of dependence.

Did not the fulfilment of all the prophecies, respecting the Messiah and his church, depend on an innumerable multitude of the volitions of men, both good and evil, in such a manner that they could not be accomplished without them; nor without their taking place in an established order and connexion? And do not the dictates of common sense constrain us to believe, that God was the ordering and disposing cause of those volitions, on which the fulfilment of his own predictions depended.

And do not christians of every denomination conform to this sentiment, in their common discourse, and in their addresses to God? When any murder is committed, or any traitorous conspiracy is carried into execution, do not they say, these are melancholy dispensations of *divine providence*? That God was pleased so to order in *his providence*, or the like? And do they not pray God to sanctify such afflictive *providences*? If they do not use such expressions in conformity to the sentiment Mr. Murray opposes, I wish to know what they mean by *providence*.

What I referred to in the assembly's catechism, is, their answer to this question, "*What are God's works of Providence?*" Mr. Murray has referred us to their confession and catechism, as bearing testimony in his favour. I am sensible they deny God's being the *author of sin*; and I suppose almost every one would, when by the author is meant the sinner, or the sinning agent. But that they supposed God to be the ordering and disposing cause of all actions, as well sinful as holy, I think is as evident as words can make it. In their confession of faith, chap. v. of Providence they say, "God, the creator of
of

of all things, doth uphold, direct, dispose and govern all creatures, *actions* and things, from the greatest even to the least." Again, in the same chapter, they say, "The almighty power, unsearchable wisdom, and infinite goodness of God, so far manifest themselves in his providence, that it extendeth even to the *first fall*, and all other *sins of angels and men* : And that *not* by a *bare permission*, but such as hath joined with it a wise and powerful bounding, or otherwise *ordering*, and *governing* them, in a manifold dispensation to his own holy and wise ends." Then, upon this, they add, what I before mentioned, a denial of God's being the author of sin. But if the obvious meaning of their words do not imply a divine agency and disposal with respect to every action or event, without discrimination, or reserve, I know of none which can convey such an idea.

But that this was the design of the assembly, I think is very evident from their proofs. Some of which are the following. 2 Sam. xxiv. 1. *And again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, Go number the people.* 1 Kings xxii. 23. *Now therefore the Lord hath put a lying spirit into the mouth of all these prophets, &c.* And Gen. 1. 20. Isaiah x. 6. and following verses.

Therefore, under the protection of the express word of God, of common sense, and the Westminster assembly, did I not add,

7. That God's being the cause of volition does not infringe upon free agency, &c ? Whether God is in the same immediate manner the cause of sinful volitions, as he is of holy, I pretend not to say ; for I know nothing about it. And perhaps it is what no mortal can safely either affirm or deny. But that God is, in some way or other, either mediately or immediately, the cause of all volitions, is as evident to me as that an effect infers a cause.

I think

I think it is generally allowed by Calvinists, that God is the immediate cause of holy volitions. And who makes any complaint about free agency on that account ? Is not man allowed to be a free agent, and God the cause of his agency in this case ? Do we not allow that some men have good tempers or dispositions ? And do we think them the less praise-worthy because these tempers were not self-originated ? Do we not venture to pronounce the man himself good ; his temper or disposition ; and not barely say the cause was good ? Do we not predicate virtue and praise-worthiness on the benevolence of the agent, in distinction from the benevolence of the cause which produced it ?

But why is there this partiality in arguing from effect to cause ? Why do we say, in *one* instance, that it is inconsistent with free agency that God should be the cause of volition, and, in *another*, readily admit him to be the cause of volition, and feel no difficulty about free agency ? If he may in *one* instance be the cause of volition, without destroying the freedom of the agent, why not in *another* ? Why is it not as necessary that holy volitions should be self-originated, in order to praise-worthiness, as that sinful ones should, in order to criminality ? But if we admit that moral agency is volition, and that all the virtue or vice, beauty or deformity, of volitions, can be found in them, will it not remove every difficulty ? Will it not then fully appear, that God's being the cause of volition does not infringe upon free agency ? For what is free agency, but volition or choosing ? And what is it to assert God to be the cause of volition, but asserting that he is the cause of free agency ? And will any one complain of God's causing his creatures to act freely ? Does not the christian think himself indebted to God for making, or causing him to be, a free voluntary agent ? And will he still deny that God is the cause of volition, which alone is voluntary action, and without which he could not be a voluntary or free agent ?

Some perhaps will say, volition is not a free action, if God be the cause of it. But what is this but saying, a thing cannot be what it in fact is, if God was a cause of its being so? Or that a person cannot be free in the exercise of freedom? And might we not as well say, motion cannot be motion, if it be produced by an extrinsic cause, or is not self-originated?

If we suppose, as some do, that sinful volitions are caused by a previous sinful propensity or disposition; it is only like fleeing from one subterfuge to another, before an irresistible foe. It gives a momentary relief, and that is all. For let us drive back as far as we will, these questions will unavoidably pursue. "Is there not a cause? and, What is the cause?" until we come to an eternal self-existing cause.

I think it has become fashionable to crowd back the sinfulness of volition upon a calamitous sinful disposition; that disposition upon the fall of Adam; and his fall upon the agency of the devil: And thus, instead of looking for criminality in that which is criminal, we seek for it in a cause; and, by this mean, place it at such a distance from ourselves as to feel very easy and unconcerned about it.

8. That men are not passive in volition, but active; they may be considered as *efficients* in volition; but not the *cause* of their own efficiency.

I meet no difficulty in agreeing with Mr. Murray, that "Every actual transgression implies an exercise of the sinner's will." But how nonentity or mere privation can rouse, and work itself up into an actual transgression, I submit to Philosophers and Metaphysicians to illustrate.

I conceive we are *efficients*, wherever we are active. Volition is not an effect, which takes place without the consent of the agent, or him that chooseth. The supposition of an involuntary volition implies a contradiction in terms. We have a capacity for volition; but are not independent of an extrinsic disposing cause.

Perhaps

Perhaps it will be said, If we are so dependent that we cannot choose when we please, or have a mind to, then we have no liberty at all. But does not such an objection imply a contradiction? Does it not suppose a person may have a mind or pleasure when he has none, or that he has a mind or pleasure when he has no mind or pleasure? What is the difference between volition and the choice or pleasure of the mind; or having a mind or will to choose, and choosing? However dependent we are for our volitions, I believe there is nothing implied in it, that will abridge any person of choosing when and what he pleases, or has a mind to; and consequently no abridgment of moral liberty.

If we allow that our hearts are in the hand of the Lord; that he is the cause of free agency in us, and we the voluntary agents; shall we not find a consistency in those seeming contradictions in scripture, which represent God as hardening the hearts of sinners, and their hardening their own hearts; of his turning them, and their turning themselves? May they not all be true, in a literal sense?

But in opposition to this, Mr. Murray teaches us, that "the agent is the cause of his own acts." (p. 29.)

If the agent be the cause of his own acts, I suppose he is either a *designing* or an *undesigning* cause. If he is an *undesigning* cause of his own volitions, can he be any more criminal or praise-worthy, than if some other being was the cause of them? Will any one be condemned or applauded for an undesigning act? But if we say he is a designing cause of his own acts, what is that but saying one volition is the cause of another; or that a man chooses to choose? And to bring the matter soon to a point, it may be asked, What is the cause of the first volition of the agent? Here I apprehend some difficulty, unless we can suppose a volition prior to the first volition.

President Edwards says, "The mind's being an elective cause, will only enable it to produce effects in consequence of its

its elections, and according to them ; but cannot enable it to be the elective cause of all its own elections, because that supposes an election before the first election."

The truth of the case I conceive to be this : God is the first and supreme cause of every action or event. Man is totally dependent on him, not only for his being, but for every faculty or power of action ; not only at his first existence, but in every succeeding moment of his existence. He cannot walk, speak, think, or will, without divine aid and energy. . Wherever the divine agency ceases, all motion ceases, whether mental or corporeal. I can no more believe that created agents are efficient of their own agency, than that they are efficient of their own existence. Is it not as easy to conceive of beings starting from nonentity into existence, by their own efficiency, as of their originating motion in themselves ? Is not every motion we perceive an invincible evidence of a supreme eternal cause ? Does not common sense constrain us to believe, that every motion we perceive was either eternal, or the effect of some extrinsic cause ? And as no motion can begin, without a prior motion to originate it, may not every motion be followed from effect to cause, until they all centre in the GREAT FIRST CAUSE, who must have been in motion from eternity, there being no prior motion to originate exercises in him ?*

Mr,

* It is thought the following Note, which appeared in a Sermon published by the Author, since the publication of his letter to Mr. Murray, may, with propriety, be introduced here.

"What is here advanced respecting the extent of divine agency, will probably wound the feelings of some pious christians : For I charitably suppose there are many good people, who think that some events have taken place contrary to the original design of Jehovah, and independent of divine efficiency. That such persons may not fail of *seeing* and *feeling* the importance of the sentiment which they oppose, the following things are proposed for their serious consideration.

1. " Whether

Mr. Murray allows, " that the power of *acting* is greater than that of mere existence ; and requires greater exertion of energy

1. " Whether that by endeavouring to maintain that some things have taken place without divine efficiency, they do not implicitly give up the foundation of all religion, both *natural* and *revealed*, by giving up all the ground upon which we prove the existence of a SUPREME ETERNAL God.

" To prove this fundamental doctrine, we have recourse to these dictates of reason, That every thing which has a beginning, has a cause ; that no change can take place in any being or thing, without a cause ; that every cause, which is not eternal, is itself the effect of some prior cause ; that secondary causes are absolutely dependent on a first cause for all their power to operate ; that the first cause must be eternal, because it could not *begin* to exist, without a cause, and there could be no *prior cause* to give existence to the *first cause*. Upon these principles it is that *the invisible things of God, from the foundation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things which are made, even his ETERNAL POWER AND GOD-HEAD*. And on these principles we may infallibly prove the divine existence, from any effect we can perceive, whether *external* or *internal* : From things which are *small*, as well as from things which are *great* ; from the existence of the smallest insect, the shaking of a leaf, from a thought of the mind, or desire of the heart, as well as from the whole material system.

" But if I should say, that one event, or one thing, may take place, independent of divine efficiency, who will venture to set the bounds where I may consistently stop ; or draw for me the line of distinction between events which take place by divine efficiency, and those which take place independent of God ? If one event may take place, without divine efficiency, why not two, ten, or ten thousand ? And why may not all things be accounted for in the same manner ?

" He who can demonstrate that one event has been produced without divine agency, will meet with no difficulty to invalidate every argument which can be advanced in proof of the being of a God. And he who denies the universality of divine operation, has not, that I can see, an inch of ground left, upon which he can consistently dispute an Atheist.

2. " The three following things will be granted by all judicious christians, viz. That it is our duty to acknowledge the hand of God, either by gratitude or submission, in every favour we receive, and every affliction we suffer, by *divine providence* ; that many of our favours and afflictions

energy in the cause which produces it."* If so, he who can act independently, can exist independently. And if action may be self-originated, existence may with greater ease, "the power of action being greater than that of mere existence."

I beg leave to adduce the joint testimony of the Presbytery, of which Mr. Murray is one, with regard to self-motion. To set forth the superiour excellency, and nobler nature of the soul, to that of mere matter, they say, "And nobler we may venture to call it, since we find it capable of thought. Thought is evidently inconsistent with the nature of mere matter. All changes wrought in matter are only the motion of its atoms. All such motions require a moving cause. If matter could produce motion in itself, then it could give existence to a being quite new and foreign to itself. But whatever can do this, can create. Every such cause must then be supposed a God."

Whether this passage does not imply that all souls are capable of self-motion, of creating, and consequently are Gods, I refer to better judges. But thus far they are explicit, that whatever can produce motion in itself, can create. And that every such cause must be supposed a God. This shews the difficulty of self-motion, in their view. I would not, however, have it understood that I suppose he who creates, originated motion in himself. This I apprehend would be a denial of the eternity of his existence.

Perhaps it will be said, if creatures are so dependent on God that his agency is necessary to effect agency in them; if his efficiency is needful in every of their actions; then he is the only agent, and he only is praise or blame-worthy.

But

tions come, through the instrumentality of moral agents; and that we are incapable of looking into the hearts of men, to determine the nature of their designs, whether good or evil. Unless then, we believe that the hearts of *all men*, at *all times*, are in the hand of the Lord, and by him turned whithersoever he will, must we not be forever at a loss, whether to acknowledge the hand of God or not, in the favours we receive, and the afflictions we suffer, by the agency of our fellow-creatures?"

* Page 20.

But does not this objection imply the very thing it denies, viz. That there are more agents than one, on supposition that God's agency is necessary to every action of his creatures? If action is produced in them, are they not agents in their own agency? When Christ caused the deaf to hear, the dumb to speak, and the blind to see; who, shall we say, heard, spake and saw? He or they? The cause, or the subject acted upon? If to assert that God is the cause of agency in his creatures, implies that he is the only agent, then must we not say, it was Christ who heard, spake, &c. and not those on whom he wrought the miracles of healing?

With regard to volitions, I suppose they are as properly our own acts as if there was no other agent in the universe. Cannot God be the cause of my agency, without being the agent of my agency. Am not I as really an agent as he is? I a dependent, he an independent agent? Does that scripture which asserts the cause was of God, when Rehoboam rejected the counsel of the old men, imply that God was the agent who wickedly rejected their counsel?

I conceive that Rehoboam, and every other sinner, is just as criminal as if they were the originating causes of all their own volitions. They are not to be blamed for the agency of the cause; nor for any thing but their own voluntary agency. We do not predicate the sinfulness of volition on the agency of the cause, but on the volition itself; on our own agency.

And is it not an absurdity to say, we predicate the sinfulness of volition, on the cause which produces it? For when we speak of the sinfulness of volition, it implies that the volition is itself sinful; but when we say the sinfulness of volition is predicated on its cause, it implies that the volition is not itself sinful, but only that its cause is sinful. So, upon this footing, volitions are sinful only by imputation; the sin of the cause being imputed to the effect.

I see no more reason to suppose, that sinful volitions must necessarily have a sinful cause, than to suppose the calf, which

Aaron

Aaron made, was shaped just like himself; or that God, who made the gold of which Aaron made the calf, was also a golden God.

It will perhaps be said that we do not predicate moral qualities, virtue or vice, on such involuntary effects as gold and molten calves. And I am very sensible we do not. And the reason, I suppose to be this, they are not voluntary exercises. If, instead of gold, or a molten calf, had been produced a rational designing choice, should we not look for moral beauty or deformity, virtue or vice, in the choice itself; just as we do for the properties of gold, in gold itself? We do not commonly inquire whether the properties of gold were in its cause, in order to estimate its value. If the properties are found in the effect, it is all that common sense requires. And may not the same be said of volition?

But if it is a just way of arguing, to infer the nature of the cause, from the nature of the effect, why do we not adopt it in other cases? When we see a bear or wolf, why do we not say, their maker is a ravening voracious being? And when we see a serpent or viper, why do we not infer, that their cause was a spiteful venomous being? I presume Mr. Murray would be shocked at such inferences as these, although he says, "There can be no positive reality in the effect, which was not first in its cause," which I really think lays a foundation for such inferences, and others too horrible and absurd to mention.

Will not the foregoing observations help to remove another objection? It is said, if evil is necessary to the greatest good, and God is the cause of it, then he is chargeable with doing evil that good may come.

But if we predicate virtue or vice, on the nature of our volitions, we must on the nature of his. And if it be a good which he aims at, in causing evil, his volition is not evil, but good. The design of the sinner may be opposite to the design of the cause, in the taking place of the same event. This is evident

evident from scripture. "Ye thought evil against me; but, God *meant it unto good.*" And this points out the difference immediately; for a good design only is virtue; and an evil design only is vice. And wherever we find them, whether in cause or effect, there we should predicate praise or blame, and no where else.

"I believe," says President Edwards, "there is no person of good understanding, who will venture to say, he is certain that it is impossible it should be best, taking in the whole compass and extent of existence, and all consequences in the endless series of events, that there should be such a thing as moral evil in the world. And if so, then such a choice is not an evil choice, but a wise and holy choice."

Having thus illustrated my ideas, I shall conclude with a few observations.

1. I think it is very evident, that Mr. Murray's good sense informed him, that if sin be not a mere privation and nonentity, then God must be in some way or other the cause of it. (See p. 22.) And whether I have discovered any absurdity in the sentiment, or any inconsistency in his writings upon it, I now submit to the impartial world. Perhaps I have only shewn myself inconsistent. But,

2. On supposition, that sin is a mere privation, or nonentity, I do not see the pertinency of his argument from the nature of causation; granting it to be conclusive. For I cannot perceive that any cause is requisite for the production, if I may so say, of nonentity. And upon his principles, when he asserts "that evil can never come from any other than an evil cause," what is it more than asserting that nonentity only can be the cause of nonentity, or that nothing but nothing can be the cause of nothing?

3. Mr. Murray supposes his opponents, to be consistent, should deny future punishment. But perhaps there is as much propriety in punishing for real voluntary evil, whatever may be the cause of it, as there is in punishing for nothing. And

if I mistake not, there is a most perfect analogy between his definition of sin, and a denial of any positive punishment. Is it not as easy to give a negative construction to those passages in scripture, which seem to import punishment, as to those which respect criminality. And shall we not be obliged so to understand them, if we admit the definition? If the Judge of the world does right, will he not observe an exact proportion between crime and punishment? And if the crime be but mere privation, and nonentity, can the punishment be any thing more?

Some perhaps may think I stand justly indicted, by Mr. Murray, as an "adversary to the truth," and a "bold blasphemer;" but I hope, notwithstanding, when the secrets of the heart are made manifest, to be acquitted, by an impartial Judge, who will not be biased by this premature indictment. Loading opponents with such illiberal epithets can have no good tendency. Nor could I have reconciled this conduct of Mr. Murray, to the principles of christian candor and benevolence, had it not been for his negative definition of evil. But if we consider that every word with him, importing criminality, must have a negative construction, it may serve to qualify the epithets, and render them less harsh and grating. For what is implied, upon his sentiments, in being an "adversary to the truth," and a "bold blasphemer," more than that a person is so perfectly indifferent with respect to God, that he has no positive exercises of heart either for or against him; and therefore says nothing about him one way or the other?

4. Mr. Murray queries, by way of objection, (p. 75,) "Is not the holy scripture full in asserting God to be the author of sin?" And then replies, "No! but the reverse in every respect." If by the word Author he means the agent or doer of evil, I can most cheerfully acquiesce; but if he only means the cause of that free agency, the inherent nature of which is moral evil, I think the scripture needs no comment

to oppose him. But if he still retains his confidence in this assertion, I hope he will favour the world with a definition of the word *cause*, as it is used in the forementioned text respecting Rehoboam. For people of ordinary capacities will be puzzled to conceive how this, as well as many other texts, is in *every*, or *any* respect the reverse of the sentiment he opposes.



S U P P L E M E N T

TO THE FOREGOING

R E M A R K S.

UPON reviewing the remarks in the preceding pages, and taking into consideration with what readiness Mr. Murray in his writings allows and treats of positively sinful exercises, I was led to suspect that he had some latent idea which I did not comprehend, couched under the terms “nonentity, or mere privation,” and positively sinful exercises. And after a critical research to investigate it, I came to the following conjecture, viz. That he supposes sin, abstractly considered, to be but mere privation of holiness; but in the concrete, i. e. with its subject, a positive reality; that sin is predicated upon a positive voluntary exercise of the sinner, and consists in want of holiness; that in nature it is a *negative*, but in exercise, a *positive*.

The idea perhaps may be thus illustrated. Let blindness be supposed to consist in the want of sight, baldness in the want of hair, nakedness in the want of clothing, and deformity in the privation or want of beauty: Then, when we speak of blindness, baldness, &c. in the abstract, the ideas are privative, importing only the privation or want of their opposites, sight, hair, clothing, or beauty; but when we say a blind, bald, naked or deformed person, here something positive is implied. So when we speak of sin in the abstract, it is supposed to import only the want of holiness; but when we say a sinful exercise, it implies a positive reality.*

I confess

* In conformity to what I conceived to be the imagination of some, I have spoken of blindness, baldness, &c. as though they might be conceived of

I confess I was much puzzled to comprehend his meaning ; but if I have now obtained it, I shall spend no time in shewing the absurdity which appears to me in the supposition of a positive volition or design, destitute of a positive nature ;* but shall proceed to inquire whether this hypothesis does not infer a positive cause for the production of evil ; and consequently remove one main pillar of Mr. Murray's discourse.

It appears to me that his whole fabrick depends upon two pillars, for its support, viz. his *principles of causation*, and his *negative definition of evil*.

1. He argues from the nature of causation *that God cannot be the cause of evil*. Why ? Because *there is no evil in him*, and “ It is certain, says he, there can be no positive reality in the effect which was not first in its cause.” Here it is obvious that his argument presupposes, and takes for granted, that there is a *positive reality in evil*, otherwise what force or pertinency is there in the argument ? But in the course of his arguments from the nature of causation, it seems that his philosophy constrains him to acknowledge, that his “ reasoning fairly concludes that God is, and ever will be, the first cause of all real positive being.” This being the case, a subterfuge or rearguard was needful. He then proceeds to give a definition of evil which is incompatible with the supposition of an efficient

of in the abstract ; but I scruple whether there is any human genius, sufficient to form an idea of any of these things, otherwise than in the concrete. Let any one attempt to form an idea of blindness, or baldness, separate from a blind or bald object, and he will perceive the difficulty immediately.

* If the word *sin*, properly speaking, imports no more than the privation of *holiness*, is it not reasonable to suppose the various terms by which we express the different kinds of sin, or the different modes of sinning, likewise import only the privation or want of their opposites ? But does *blasphemy* imply no more than the want of a temper to *praise* and *honour* our Maker ? Does *murder* imply no more than the want of that benevolent affection to our neighbour which the law requires ? Does *cursing*, and wishing *eternal damnation* on our fellow-creatures, imply only the want of a heart to *bless* them and to *seek their eternal felicity* ?

-cient cause of its production : And from thence argues the absurdity of supposing God to be the cause of it, in the following words, viz. " Unless therefore we would venture to say, that the Great First Cause is a deficient cause, we may not go about to affirm that it required an exertion of his omnipotent energy to produce sin ; or that defect, nonentity, or mere privation, is the effect of divine creating might."

These pillars seem to be placed one under the other for the security of the superstructure. The necessity of their being thus situated is obvious ; for their opposition is such they cannot stand in conjunction. For if sin be a " mere privation," the argument from causation is without weight ; and if there be a positive reality in it, the argument from privation is fallacious. And just as much weight as you allow to one, just so much you invalidate the other. But to return to the inquiry. What is the cause of *evil* upon this new hypothesis, viz. That sin is a mere privation, implying a positive exercise as its subject ? It is evident, from the premises, 1. That all the deformity, turpitude or criminality of volition, consists in its destitution of holiness. 2. That all which can be denominated *positive* sinfulness, is bare volition. So the only question to be considered appears to be this, What is the cause of that positive subject, the voluntary exercise of the sinner, upon which *moral evil* is predicated ? This question Mr. Murray has answered himself, in the passage just quoted, in which he owns that his " reasoning fairly concludes that God is, and ever will be, the first cause of all *real positive being*."* Here

I think

* Page 22. Left it should be suspected that I misrepresent Mr. Murray, I will transcribe the whole sentence. " Although this reasoning fairly concludes, that God is, and ever will be, the cause of all *real positive being*, and of all good, both natural and moral, in the universe, yet it will by no means follow that he is the author or cause of evil." To make the latter clause consistent with the former, he introduces his negative definition of evil. But I have applied the former clause to nothing but what is confessedly a positive reality, viz. the positive volition or exercise of the sinner.

I think is granted all that I have supposed in the foregoing pages. I have supposed God to be the cause of no evil, but by being the cause of volition or free action. As to the cause of the supposed negative part of criminality, that has not yet been the subject of my inquiry ; and I scruple whether it ever will be. If I had not supposed moral evil to be included in a positive volition, which I could not conceive to be self-originated, I should not have supposed the Divine Being to be in any sense the cause of it. I never thought of ascribing to divine efficiency, such a rare production as "nonentity, or mere privation." But it ever has been, and is still, beyond me to conceive how any positive effect can come into existence, otherwise than in a dependence upon the divine will and agency. But if Mr. Murray's own words are not a sufficient answer to the question under consideration, I would refer the reader back to the illustration of the 6th, 7th, and 8th ideas, in the preceding pages.

The way and manner in which the divine efficiency is employed for the production of volition, I have no where attempted to shew. This is a matter which is not revealed : And I have endeavoured to keep within the compass of divine revelation. Besides, I believe it to be altogether above human comprehension. But when God by his word expressly declares that, *The way of man is not in himself ; that his goings are of the Lord ; that in him we live and move and have our being*, I think myself bound to believe it, although I cannot comprehend the ways of the Spirit. I conceive it to be both arrogance and presumption to contradict the word of God, because we cannot comprehend his works. From the wisdom and goodness of God, I think I may justly infer, that volition or free action is produced in a way that is in no wise inconsistent with praise or blame, reward or punishment : And if I have not failed in my illustration of ideas, which respect moral agency, I think it is not very difficult to see the possibility and reasonableness of it.

If

If there be any absurdity or "blasphemy," expressed or implied, in supposing God to be the cause of evil, in the sense I have explained it, I most cordially wish to see it pointed out. At the same time, I must think it but a poor shift to deny the positive nature of sin, and yet allow it to have a positive subject; and admit God to be the cause of the subject upon which evil is predicated, but not the cause of the evil which is predicated upon it. The absurdity may perhaps more fully appear by alluding to a scripture metaphor: The potter makes a number of vessels, some to honour, others to dishonour; some beautiful, others deformed: The deformity of the latter, however, is supposed to consist in the privation or want of beauty: The potter is the cause of the vessel upon which deformity is predicated, but not the cause of deformity; because that consists in mere privation or want of beauty; which admits of no efficient cause. To apply the metaphor; God must be supposed the cause of the positive exercises upon which evil is predicated; but not the cause of the evil: For that consists in "mere privation" or want of holiness.

This I conceive to be a just illustration according to the conjecture: But whether I have hit right in that, is uncertain. And this uncertainty, perhaps, will be sufficient to apologize for my publishing the remarks, which I had written previous to the conjecture, upon the negative definition of evil. The insufficiency of Mr. Murray's "first principle," or pillar, I think was fairly shewn in the beginning of the preceding remarks; and if so, his scheme naturally falls upon the second, viz. "Nonentity, or mere privation." A slender foundation for such a ponderous superstructure! And notwithstanding the ingenious evasion which has been considered in this supplement, I humbly conceive, that when his discourse is examined with philosophical and theological strictness, it will appear to have no better foundation than the house which was built on the sand.

Mr.

Mr. Murray insinuates that his opponents have made but little use of scripture in defence of their side of the question ; the justice of which I submit to impartial readers. Mr. Murray has indeed made some use of scripture. But for what purpose ? Why, to prove what all his opponents readily grant, and constantly affirm, viz. that God is invariably good, that he does no evil, and cannot be tempted with it. If he had first proved it to be inconsistent with goodness to cause evil to take place, such texts as he has produced would have been sufficient to silence the controversy. But this I think he has not done.

I have proceeded much further in a course of argumentation than I at first intended ; and perhaps further than will be thought proper for one in my station. I have, however, endeavoured to preserve a consistency in my remarks, with the title I have assumed, an *Impartial Inquirer* : But whether I have or not, others will judge. If I have, and Mr. Murray should still remain steadfast in the sentiments he has published to the world, and should condescend to reply to my remarks, I think I have a right to expect,

1. That he will shew how it can be otherwise than that " God is all things," and " all things are God," upon his hypothesis, that " there can be no positive reality in the effect, which was not first in its cause."

2. That he will explain how the first evil that took place in the universe, could be the effect of an evil cause, i. e. of an evil prior to the first evil.

3. That he will demonstrate, from scripture or reason, that moral evil is but " nonentity or mere privation."

4. That he will shew how it could be consistent with divine goodness to permit evil to take place, on supposition that it was not " necessary for the greatest good of the universe and the greatest glory of God."

5. That he will explain how the divine character may be vindicated from the charge of sinful deficiency, on his supposition,

“ That infinite wisdom and power” do not “ choose and do the very best at all times that they can.”

6. That he will demonstrate the consistency of supposing that God willed to permit sin, without willing it to be.

7. That he will shew his authority for giving a negative construction to the plain and positive declarations of the UNERRING SPIRIT.

8. That he will, in a friendly manner, point out wherein I have erred, in what I have written, from the *faith once delivered to the saints*..

The point I have attended to claims such affinity with the divine character, that every christian must feel interested in the cause : And no pains which may be taken, can equal the importance of a right understanding of it. A great degree of charity, candour and impartiality are requisite in controverting a point so delicate. It is an easy matter to raise a hue-and-cry of *heresy*, *blasphemy*, and *damnable doctrine*, against almost any performance whatever : And this is often accepted as invincible proof of the fallacy of a sentiment, and has a most pernicious influence on the minds of those who choose rather to take their sentiments from their teacher, than to be at the pains of examining whether *these things are so*. I am sorry that I have had occasion to take notice of any thing in Mr. Murray’s discourse, which it is difficult to reconcile to that charity which seeketh not her own. The harsh epithets of “ bold blasphemer,” and “ adversary to the truth,” are hard to be borne by any one who feels a friendly attachment to the divine character, and the cause of truth and righteousness. I doubt not but Mr. Murray’s sentiments appear to me as irreconcilable to the word of God, as the sentiments he was opposing did to him : But I cannot think, were I his equal, that it would be for the honour of God, or the advantage of truth, for me to adopt his method to shew the absurdity of them. I have indeed, once or twice, in the foregoing and subsequent remarks,

adopted

adopted a lower degree of his terrifying language ; not because I have any delight in it ; but I thought it reasonable that he should have the advantage of seeing some of his *severe* rhetorick in the retorted mode. May HE whose honour is concerned, give us an impartial spirit, and guide us into all truth.





A P P E N D I X.

THERE are some things in Mr. Murray's discourse, which I think are worthy of particular attention, respecting absolute sovereignty and submission. p. 46, 47, 48, 52, 53, 54.

1. We are taught that "God acted from mere absolute sovereignty from eternity;" and that "In giving being, he acted the absolute sovereign in the highest sense."

2. That after creation, "No more then can he be considered as acting towards creatures once made, merely in the light of an absolute sovereign." Again, "When we speak of the sovereignty of God, then in any acts done subsequent to creation, we ought to mean not arbitrary pleasure, abstracted from all reason or rule." To enforce this, he quotes Dr. Edwards, who says, "Sovereignty, separated from all respect to goodness, is no idea of God; but of some merciless tyrant rather; yea, of the spirit of darkness, that strong armed man; but power and strength, guided by goodness and holiness, are truly heavenly and divine."

3. We are told that "Whatever is fixed on as the primary idea of God, all things must be so explained as to be consistent with that." "The sovereignty already mentioned, is fixed on by some. Accordingly, the whole of their experimental religion, seems to be resolved into absolute submission to absolute sovereignty, and constant rejoicing in its reign." But for the consolation of him who has no evidence of this submission, Mr. Murray ventures to say, "No such object of worship being set up in the Bible, he may rest assured that no
such

such being rules the universe. Far from assuming the character of absolute sovereignty, ~~divested~~ of every thing else, the glorious JEHOVAH is there proposed to us as an infinite, eternal, all-perfect spirit, possessing, in boundless perfection, the attributes of mercy, love, and goodness ; of wisdom, power, and holiness ; of truth, justice and righteousness, as the essentials of his nature. In obedience and submission to such a character, the duty and happiness of every rational creature lie ; and to the truly rational every such act will give the most refined delight. But sovereignty, to be absolute, must be separated from all these ; and to rejoice in the government of such a being, is impossible to reason : Indeed, to such a being no submission is due : None such did ever fill the celestial throne. If, instead of this ideal sovereign, they would put the sceptre into the hands of a supreme ruler, whose will is ever conformed to his own eternal reason, and incapable of deviating from the moral perfections of his nature, all right minds will join them in rejoicing in his reign."

Query 1. By what authority does Mr. Murray so peremptorily assert, that God was separated from the attributes of "mercy, love, goodness," &c. until after the work of creation ? "Sovereignty, says he, to be absolute, must be separated from all these ;" yet "God acted from mere absolute sovereignty from eternity ;" and "in giving being, God acts the absolute sovereign in the highest sense."

Query 2. How often does the phrase, "absolute sovereignty," shift its meaning ? In one place we find the GLORIOUS DEITY acting in that character ; but in writing a few pages, the character becomes so odious that "none such did ever fill the celestial throne." Words thus changeable, I think, ought not to be used. For although we may be assured in one place, that the MOST HIGH is thereby characterized ; the distance of a few pages may render it uncertain, whether he is again meant, or his adversary the *devil*, clothed in the same livery.

Whether

Whether Mr. Murray intended it or not, his own heart and the day of judgment will determine ; but from the manner of his introducing and treating the doctrine of sovereignty and submission, his readers have been led to suppose, that he meant to represent, that some persons, who cannot adopt his sentiments upon the "*Origin of Evil*," make absolute submission to a "merciless tyrant" the highest duty. But who are they ? Who are the persons that represent God as a "merciless tyrant," and then urge the duty of absolute submission ? Do the following descriptions of sovereignty, the requirements of God, and the duty of his creatures, justify the insinuation ?

"Trusting in the Lord, implies entire submission to his will. For God is a sovereign. By the sovereignty of God is not meant, if the observation is necessary, that he is a capricious unreasonable being. For the thought is not admissible, that he ever acts, but under the guidance of infinite wisdom, and the influence of infinite goodness. God is perfect in his nature and administrations. He is infinitely wise to discern what is best ; he is infinitely good to choose what is best ; and he is infinitely powerful. He must, therefore, from the infinite perfection of his nature, adopt and execute the best possible plan. Those, therefore, who have any proper acquaintance with the consummate excellency of his character, must necessarily trust him without reserve. They choose that God should give them more or less health, as he sees fit ; that he should set the bounds of life, and order all the circumstances of death ; they possess nothing, not excepting their immortal souls, but what they freely commit to him ; because he is infinitely perfect."

One says, "As God ever loves himself supremely, not because the object is himself, but because he is God ; and all his rational creatures in a perfectly just degree, without any partial respect to *me*, because the object is *myself* : And as he seeks *his* interest, and the interest of his creatures, not from

any

any partial respect to *their* interest or his *own*; but because they are, so far as he seeks them, the *common* interest: And as he is fully disposed to improve all things, himself not excepted, in just such a manner as is most conducive to the highest good of the universe: So he requires us to love him, with all our hearts, and our neighbour as ourselves; without any partial respect to any person or interest; and to be fully disposed to have that very use made of all things, ourselves not excepted, which shall best promote the highest good of the whole."*

These

* This paragraph, I conceive, will give a just view of what Mr. Murray calls "The ingenious discovery that creatures ought not to desire their own felicity, or wish to escape eternal misery;" and also of most of his practical consequences. And the others appear to me so groundless and extraordinary, that but few impartial and judicious readers will be scrupulous of their design.

I believe, however, that Mr. Murray was not the first who inferred horrible and terrifying consequences from the sentiment he opposes. The holy Apostles, I conceive, preached the same doctrine; and some, we are informed, ventured to affirm that they said, "Let us do evil, that good may come."

The quotations from the "result of a venerable council," no one will think it incumbent on me, either to vindicate or condemn. I will only observe,

1. That it is possible what Mr. Murray has marked as quotations, might appear in a different light, in the connexion they were first used, from what they do now, however upright the venerable council or Mr. Murray may have been in the representation. Misunderstanding often occasions misrepresentation.

2. From the allowed principles of fallibility, it is possible that the gentleman referred too, expressed himself inadvertently and imprudently. Besides,

3. If Mr. Pope has been injured, is it not possible that this gentleman has received somewhat similar treatment?

4. However it may be with respect to the propriety of the sentiment, which Mr. Murray opposes in his marginal note, p. 97, I think his argument to prove the impossibility of being willing to be damned for the glory of God, stands upon a very slender foundation. He says, "The
damnation

These passages contain the *sum* of what I have ever discovered in the writings of those who are supposed to be particularly aimed at in Mr. Murray's discourse, with respect to *sovereignty* and *submission*. And if there be any thing of the "*merciless tyrant*," either expressed or implied, I wish to see it pointed out.

Mr. Murray seems perfectly to agree with these Authors, that submission is due to the "all-perfect Spirit," who rules the universe. For he says, "In obedience and submission to such a character, the duty and happiness of every rational creature

damnation here supposed to be chosen, is either just or unjust: *If the former*, then to choose this, is to choose to dishonour him by sinning here, in order to deserve a punishment, in which we shall do all we can to dishonour him in suffering forever." Here I apprehend something is taken for granted, which is not easily proved, viz. that sinners have not dishonoured God enough already, to deserve punishment, so but that to be willing to be punished, they must choose to dishonour him, by sinning, in order to deserve it. When Mr. Murray has proved this perhaps the gentleman he has censured will be ready to answer for himself.

5. With respect to being "sorry for the worst crimes," it is very possible and very probable to me, from the information I have had, that the sentiment is misrepresented: Whether designedly or not, I pretend not to say. If there be no difference between being sorry for our sins, and being sorry, on the whole, that those events have taken place; then I suppose the sentiment is fairly represented, and not otherwise. But in my view there is a wide difference. Might not those Jews who were guilty in crucifying the Saviour of the world, be sorry for their wicked and abominable designs; and not, on the whole, be sorry that Christ, by their wicked hands, had been crucified and slain; while they considered that they had done what God's hand and counsel had determined before to be done? For them to be sorry, on the whole, that the event of their wicked conduct had taken place, would imply, that they were sorry that God's wise and holy designs were accomplished. The salvation of sinners as really depended on that conduct of the Jews, as it did on the death and sufferings of Christ, which were thereby effected; and therefore for them to be sorry, on the whole, for the existence of that event, they must, on the whole, be sorry for the salvation of sinners, and the displays of divine glory in consequence thereof.

ture lie." The difference seems not to be with regard to the duty of submission ; but only with respect to the object to whom they would submit : And not with regard to what he is now ; but what he was previous to creation, and in giving being.

But if the gentlemen Mr. Murray opposes, have been in an error, in supposing that God was just as good, holy and righteous, wise and powerful, from eternity, and in giving being, as he is now in governing the world ; would it not have been better if he had written something to shew them their mistake, than to have taken the advantage of their ignorance on this point, to represent them as worshipping such an obnoxious "merciless tyrant," as he seems to suppose the Most High was, antecedently to creation ?

But is not this a solemn affair ? Is it not truly astonishing that Mr. Murray should so represent the sentiments of his opponents ? But why do I mention any injury done to fellow worms ? What is that in comparison to the injury done to the *divine character* ? Can christians, who confide in the immutability of divine goodness, ever believe that "God acted from mere absolute sovereignty from eternity," in Mr. Murray's sense of the phrase ? Can they believe that in devising the glorious plan of redemption, in ordaining a future state of retribution, and in determining the vessels of mercy and wrath ; I say can they believe that in these things God was separated from the attributes of "mercy, love, and goodness ; from wisdom, power, and holiness ;" and acted like a "merciless tyrant," "abstracted from all reason and rule ?" And can they believe that "in giving being" God acts the absolute sovereign in the highest sense ; i. e. in the highest sense, like a "merciless tyrant," and *that* without "*wisdom*" or "*power* ?" Can they think this is characteristick of the *Father of lights, in whom is no variableness or shadow of turning* ? But when they farther consider, that they are taught, by "a man of education in his senses," to believe, not only this ;

but also, in one breath, that "God acted from mere absolute sovereignty from eternity;" and in another, that *no such being ever filled the celestial throne*; will they not be ready to adopt Mr. Murray's language, and say, "We are struck with no less astonishment at the capacity of the human mind for swallowing contradiction, than horror at the article which completes the odium attempted to be thrown on the character of the HOLY ONE of Israel!!!"

It is needless, I apprehend, to enlarge, to shew the absurdity and contradiction of what Mr. Murray has written upon this point. I cannot think that in the cool of the day he will avow the sentiment, which in the heat of his zeal against his opponents, he has exhibited to the world: But unless he should think the absurdity so flagrantly manifest, that there is no danger that any one will be misled; can he, upon principles of uprightness, refrain from a publick retraction?

The manner in which Mr. Murray has treated his opponents, with respect to absolute sovereignty and submission, and also in some other instances, has often forced on my mind, the following observations of Dr. Watts. But whether they are applicable to any part of his discourse, the impartial will determine.

"Disputers," says he, "when they grow warm, are ready to run into this fallacy. They dress up the opinion of their adversary as they please, and ascribe sentiments to him, which he doth not acknowledge; and when they have, with a great deal of pomp, attacked and confounded these images of straw, of their own making, they triumph over their adversary, as though they had utterly confuted his opinion."

"It is a fallacy of the same kind which a disputer is guilty of when he finds that his adversary is too hard for him, and that he cannot fairly prove the question proposed: He then with slyness and subtlety turns the discourse aside to some other kindred point, which he can prove, and exults in that

new

new argument, wherein his opponent never contradicted him." Logick, b. 3. c. 3. §. 1.

Notwithstanding the freedom I have used in my remarks, I think that I can say, with uprightness, that I have no desire to prejudice any person's mind against Mr. Murray. I wish his discourse and my remarks may have an impartial examination, and that each of them may stand or fall according to their merit.

I esteem Mr. Murray to be a man of great and improved abilities, capable of doing much good as a Minister of the gospel. But neither the moral character of a man, whether bad or good, nor his natural or acquired abilities, whether small or great, should have any influence on our minds, in determining the propriety or fallacy of his sentiments. For bad men may reason with accuracy and propriety; the feeble-minded may have some good ideas; good men may err; and **GREAT MEN ARE NOT ALWAYS WISE.**



